DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 418 052 SP 037 834

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TITLE Violence Prevention Preparation: A Survey of Colleges of Education and Departments of Teacher Education.
PUB DATE 1998-02-27
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (New Orleans, LA, February 25-28, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; Curriculum; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Preservice Teacher Education; *Prevention; *School Safety; Student Behavior; Students; *Violence

ABSTRACT

Surveys of teacher education programs at U.S. colleges and universities examined what is being done to prepare teachers to respond to school violence and participate in prevention programs. Questionnaires were mailed to department heads and deans of colleges and universities belonging to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. The questionnaires examined attitudes and policies with respect to including violence prevention in the teacher education curriculum. They asked whether there was a single course in the teacher education curriculum that focused exclusively on violence prevention and intervention in schools; whether the institution sponsored workshops related to violence prevention; and if faculty and staff consulted on a local or state level regarding issues related to school violence. Specific topics addressed included conflict resolution, peer mediation training, crisis response, gang awareness, classroom strategies for disruptive behaviors, violence de-escalation, and knowledge of search and seizure procedures and due process laws. A total of 350 administrators responded to the survey. Results indicated that most institutions were doing very little to prepare teachers to cope with school violence. Fewer than half believed their schools needed more preparation for teachers in violence preparation. Administrators who had heard reports about school violence from recent graduates tended to offer more workshops and seminars on violence. Contain 15 references. (Author/SM)

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ED 418 052

Running head: VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Violence Prevention Preparation: A Survey of Colleges of Education and Departments of Teacher Education

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Abstract

Violence has been increasingly recognized as a serious problem in the U.S., particularly among the young. Violence occurs on school premises and students' performance is hampered by experiencing or observing violence at home and in the community. This report describes a survey of teacher education programs at U.S. colleges and universities, to determine what is being done to prepare teachers to respond to violence and participate in prevention programs. Questionnaires were mailed to department heads and deans to determine attitudes and policies with respect to including violence prevention in the teacher education curriculum. A total of 350 administrators reported having a specific course in violence prevention, while 44% indicated that violence prevention is incorporated in existing courses. A little less than half the administrators believed that more needed to be done to prepare teachers in violence prevention.

Violence Prevention Preparation: A Survey of Colleges of Education and Departments of Teacher Education

Attorney General Janet Reno writes, "I think youth violence is probably the most serious crime problem that we face in America today" (1993, p. 50). A 1990 survey from the Federal Center for Disease Control estimates that one in twenty adolescents carries a gun. During the 1980's, more than 11,000 high school students were killed by guns (Menken, 1992). This atmosphere of youth violence has found its way into the classroom. From 1986-1990, 71 persons (65 students/ 6 school personnel) were killed by guns at school, 201 were severely wounded, and 242 were held hostage by gun-armed assailants (Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, 1990). A 1993 national survey of public school teachers found that 11 percent of teachers and 23 percent of students reported being victims of violence in or around their school (Coben, Weiss, Mully & Dearwater, 1994). Over 5,000 secondary school teachers are physically attacked at school each month (Hranitz & Eddowes, 1990). The National School Safety Center reports approximately 28,200 students are physically attacked in America's secondary schools each month; one teacher reported that he got his training in violence prevention the day a student pointed a gun in his face (Nims & Loposer, 1997). There is a growing body of literature on the personal safety of school personnel (Quarles, 1989). In addition to actual injury, school violence is a significant factor in teacher burnout and attrition (Farber, 1994; Kadel & Follman, 1993; Toby, 1993).

It is certainly a debatable policy issue whether schools should have the sole responsibility for addressing the violence that occurs within its jurisdiction. This is a time when schools are chastised for not adequately inculcating excellence in basic education. School personnel are under increasing pressure to meet the demands of educational reform. It seems

onerous indeed to demand yet another social ill be added to the school's agenda. Yet, in an atmosphere where both teachers and students feel a threat to their mental and physical well-being, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to concentrate on teaching and learning. The question remains, who is responsible for addressing the issue of violence in schools and more specifically what role do teacher preservice education programs need to play in this process?

From the broadest perspective, some would suggest that educational reform can go far in diminishing violence in our society (Menken, 1992). Designing educational programs that prepare every child for the responsibilities of citizenship and provide the basic skills required for earning a living will connect young people to mainstream values and ameliorate the economic despair commonly found in the American underclass. School personnel also need specific knowledge and skills regarding how to address violence that occurs in schools, and how to influence youth in diminishing the level of community violence. The purpose of this study was to survey U.S. colleges and universities to determine what teacher education programs are doing to prepare entry level teachers with skills to prevent and respond to adolescent violence. If society is earnest about restraining youth violence, both schools and teacher education programs must be involved.

Violence Prevention

When it comes to specific measures, little national data have been gathered concerning what schools are doing to address violence. Violence prevention activities appear to fall into seven areas: (1) violence prevention instruction; (2) conflict mediation and resolution to avoid in-school violence; (3) discipline and security policies and procedures; (4) general crisis management plans; (5) support services, including services for students with needs stemming

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from violence victimization; (6) alternative schools and classrooms for students with severe behavioral problems; (7) inservice training for personnel, on violence de-escalation. Examples of all of these can be found at sites around the country (Walker, 1989; Leff, 1992; McFadden, 1992).

A survey was done of elementary, middle, and high school principals in Arkansas, concerning their perceptions of violence in the schools and the need for violence prevention programs (Enger & Howerton, 1993). A group of 239 administrators responded; of those, 96.6% believed there was a need for student violence prevention programs, and 97.1% believed there was a need for violence prevention inservice programs for teachers. Findings were consistent for both urban and rural schools. However, most school systems are just beginning to respond to school violence by instituting one or more of these programs.

Part of the slowness of the proliferation of violence prevention and intervention programs is because school personnel are not prepared with knowledge and skills to design and implement appropriate policies and prevention strategies. There is a role for the institutions of higher education to prepare education professionals that can address the violence they face in the local schools. Pepperdine University is currently pilot testing materials called "School Safety Leadership Curriculum," designed to be used in college teacher preparation programs (Hughes, 1994). While this may be a worthy effort, there is a need to determine what is being done now in higher education.

Method

Questionnaires were mailed to department heads and deans of colleges and universities which are members of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) in

order to determine attitudes and policies with respect to violence prevention in the teacher education curriculum. A total of 350 administrators responded to the nationwide survey. Questions asked included whether there was a single course in the teacher education curriculum that focused exclusively on violence prevention and intervention in schools; whether the institution sponsored or conducted workshops related to violence prevention; and if faculty and staff in the institution acted as consultants on a local or state level regarding issues related to school violence. Specific topics addressed in the survey ranged from conflict resolution and peer mediation training, crisis response, gang awareness, classroom strategies for disruptive behaviors and violence de-escalation to knowledge of search and seizure procedures and due process laws.

The questionnaire was designed to elicit data on the items outlined above. There were three forms of the questionnaire, each covering the same theme. The form for deans was more focused on overall institutional policy, while the form for department heads in colleges of education was more focused on instructional issues. It was felt that in a large institution each of those positions would have a quite different perspective, and would have direct knowledge of different aspects of the research questions of this study. In small institutions without a college of education, heads of departments of teacher education (or similar units) would have both the perspective of broad program policies and instruction; the form designed for this group combined elements of the two forms designed for the colleges of education. Questions common to two or more forms of the questionnaire had identical wording to provide for valid comparisons.

The questionnaires were pretested for clarity and content validity, using a small group of administrators and professors in a college of education, and a class of doctoral students in educational leadership. After the questionnaire was revised it was mailed to the study population.

Procedure

The questionnaire was sent to all institutions in January, 1996. For those institutions large enough to have a college of education, questionnaires were sent to both the dean and the appropriate department head for completion. Because not all institutions conform to the simple organization of departments supervised by deans of colleges, there is discrepancy between the size of each group. Instruments were mailed to 422 deans and 410 departments in the larger institutions. In smaller institutions, the appropriate department head received the questionnaire. There were 250 in this group. In some cases, questionnaires were sent to proxies in the appropriate administrative unit, as the desired administrator was not listed in the AACTE Directory. In other cases, questionnaire completion was delegated to proxies. After four weeks, data collection ceased, and analysis proceeded on the basis of the returned questionnaires.

Results

Analysis was of two primary types. The first, descriptive, compiled aggregate statistics on how respondents answered various questions, reported as numbers and percents. Comparisons were then made between the three groups of administrators. In addition, institutions were grouped according to the annual number of education graduates; comparisons were then made on that basis.

Table 1 presents descriptive data from the three subgroups. The table shows pertinent questionnaire items, with the number and percent of respondents in each group. For some items there are data on only two groups, as not all items were included on all forms of the questionnaire. Percents are shown in parentheses, and used as a base of the original sample size

of each group. In all cases more than 50% of questionnaires were completed by proxies other than the administrator intended. It is assumed that the proxies were sufficiently knowledgeable to accurately answer the questionnaire items.

Respondents indicated that very few institutions (6.7% of large institutions and 3.8% of small ones), offer a specific violence prevention course. Less than half (44%) reported that violence prevention content is provided in other components of the curriculum. Only 5-6% of respondents believed that their institutions should develop a single course to address violence prevention. Less than half (43-48%) thought that their institutions should do more to prepare school personnel in the area of violence prevention. About the same proportions (49%, 37%) thought the curriculum should be supplemented. Only a minority of institutions (28%, 35%) reported that they had a faculty mentoring program for recent education graduates.

Analysis then considered whether hearing reports of school violence from recent graduates interacted with attitudes and policies regarding violence prevention efforts. These data are presented in Table 2. It was found that those administrators that had heard reports about violence experienced by recent graduates were more likely to have offered workshops and seminars on violence. They thought institutions should do more to prepare teachers to deal with violence, and reported that their curriculum had content to deal with violence prevention and intervention.

Discussion

The study outlined above has no hypothesis, but is simply attempting to describe the state of the art in violence education provided to future teachers at the undergraduate level by institutions of higher education. The rationale for this study is that school personnel have a role

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in addressing the violence problem in the U.S., and that those personnel could be trained for that role by institutions of higher education. The study reported here indicates that there is no widely recognized mandate among the teacher preparation programs to address violence as there appears to be for drug education or sex education.

Findings indicate that most institutions are doing very little to prepare teachers to cope with violence as it occurs in schools or to address the community violence that is faced by their students. Those administrators that have heard about violence encountered by recent graduates are more likely to report programmatic efforts to address violence for teachers-in-training. This may be a function of where those institutions are located and the communities and school systems they tend to serve.

Violence education is an emerging field, and it is expected that universities and colleges will be expanding their involvement in this area. Some administrators of teacher education programs worry about the pressures to pack ever more content and skills into the undergraduate teacher education curriculum. For some it may be unrealistic to add full courses in violence education, but they can rather determine ways to enhance existing courses. As society becomes more concerned about violence, as polls indicate they are, institutions will feel compelled to respond by enhancing the curriculum to provide for violence prevention concepts and skills.

It is also important to note that violence prevention, as all prevention, must be holistic, addressing not only individual knowledge, attitudes, and behavior, but also school and community environments. This becomes the concern of not only teachers but also administrators, parents, and the community-at-large. Systemic change is far more complex than adding another course in teacher training. It requires a collaborative effort from government, universities,

community groups, media, and the private sector. It appears there is much work to do in responding to youth violence in America. The question is what part teacher education programs will play in that response.

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Table 1

Questionnaire Responses from Deans, and Department Heads from Large (DH1) and Small (DH2) Institutions with Undergraduate Education Programs

	Deans	DH1	DH2
Responses	178	103	79
Response rates	42.1%	25.1%	31.6%
Proxies	108(63.2)	59(57.3)	40(53.3)
Violence prevention course offered	12(6.7)	7(6.7)	3(3.8)
Content dispersed	78(43.8)	NA	35(44.3)
Mentoring program	63(35.3)	NA	22(27.8)
Students aware of violence policies at site of student teaching	128(71.9)	NA	11(13.9)
Heard reports of violence from recent graduates	98(55.0)	NA	32(40.5)
Should do more (agree or strongly agree) to prepare teachers	85(47.7)	NA	34(43.0)
Should offer single course (agree or strongly agree)	9(5.0)	NA	5(6.3)
Should supplement curriculum (agree or strongly agree)	87(48.8)	NA	29(36.7)

Note. Numbers in parentheses are percents.

Table 2

Comparison of Teacher Education Administrators' Attitudes Regarding Selected Violence Prevention Issues by Whether They Have Heard Reports of Violence from Recent Graduates

	Heard Violence Reports	
	Yes	No
Have offered violence prevention workshops seminars, conferences		
Yes	55(44)+	25(21.9)
No	70(56)	89(78.1)
Institutuion should do more to prepare teachers to deal with violence		
Strongly agree, Agree	77(59.2)+	41(36.9)
Unsure	31(23.8)	44(39.6)
Disagree, Strongly Disagree	22(17)	26(23.5)
There are one or more courses in the curriculum that deal with violence prevention and intervention		
Yes	69(64.4)++	59(43.7)
No	38(35.6)	76(56.3)
Institution ensures that student teachers are aware of violence policies in the schools where they are placed for student teaching		
Yes	103(80.4)*	77(67.5)
No	13(10.3)	22(19.4)
Don't Know	12(9.3)	15(13.1)

Note. n=242, Numbers in parentheses are percents.
++ chi square significant at $p<0.001$
+ chi square significant at $p<0.01$
* not significant

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